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## REAL PROJECTS AND OTHERS

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The third-grade room was astir this morning. Had not "teacher" told her class to bring all sorts of things from home with which to play store? Yes, they were really going to play store during the arithmetic period. Everyone felt sorry for poor Mary Jones, who could not come because her little sister had the measles.

The long, plain table near the big desk was piled high with ribbons, gloves, neckties, stockings, cheap jewelry, and picture-books. There was even a pair of perfectly new shoes that Andy Carroll had brought.

"Teacher" had some boxes of paper money, and everyone was to have a chance to make a purchase. Of course, the things were not to be bought "for keeps," but that would not spoil the fun.

Who should be "clerk" and sell these treasures to the waiting customers? "Teacher" alone knew, and she did not deign to tell till class time came.

"Who wishes to be clerk?" she asked.

There was such a show of hands that it was obvious that a clerk could not be selected just by calling for volunteers.

"We'll have Michael Regan for our clerk," she said. "Michael had such a good lesson yesterday. Be careful to make change correctly, Michael, or your customers will complain."

Nobody told these children that they were learning arithmetic by the project method. The teacher herself did not know it, for all this happened several years ago, before the word project was bandied about so freely in educational circles.

Four or five miles away, a little rural school was making unusual plans for spring. The five older boys were laying out garden plots on paper in the intervals between geography and history. The arithmetic books lay in the desks, unused and dusty, but their owners were learning to "figure" with an accuracy they had

never known before. They were estimating the dimensions of beds and garden plots, and their brains were busy with computations and costs connected with the "projected" planting. The English class was writing business letters to seed firms, and inclosing real stamps and money orders.

Nobody told these boys that they were learning drawing and arithmetic and English, to say nothing of agriculture, by the project method. Nor did they so label their summer's experience, when, in the autumn, they compared accounts and balanced the books that showed their outgo, their income, and their net profits.

A city high school in the same state is conducting a real school newspaper which appears regularly each fortnight. Its news items are the work of eager students, its comments and editorials the product of student brains. Students manage the finances and solicit the advertising. The paper serves a real purpose in disseminating news and in the promotion of harmony and oneness in the school.

The students know the paper as the *Mercury*. I am sure that these members of the journalism classes in the High School of Commerce of Worcester, Massachusetts, do not realize that they are helping to carry on a project in the truest sense of the word.

Recently, however, schoolroom practices of a quite different nature have come to be labeled projects without a true conception of the real significance of the word.

A long sand-table in a fifth-grade room is now the center of attraction. A winding river with yellow sand banks runs the entire length of the table. To be sure, the river is made of narrow strips of glass, but it looks quite realistic.

Real rubber-tree twigs, leaves, moss, and grass make a wilderness lining both banks of the miniature Amazon. Little models of boats laden with crude rubber float down the glassy river. Tiny clay men gather the sap in the forest, prepare it crudely over mock fires, or carry it to the river boats. There are native huts thatched with grass.

Samples of rubber in different stages of its manufacture occupy most of the space on the bulletin board. Essays on different phases of the subject are in preparation during the English hour.

"Our project this term is the 'Rubber Industry of the Amazon Forests,'" you are told. Children talk glibly about their "rubber project," and the word project is generally in the air.

But is it a project? Good teaching it is, surely, but what relation has it to real life? It makes geography alive, vivid, interesting, to these intermediate-grade children. In short, it is a good example of the successful use of the "play way," but it touches life itself too little to be called a project.

A Freshman English division is enthusiastic over *Julius Caesar*. Many of the shorter scenes have been dramatized by the class. Longer scenes have been read with improvised action to suit the words. The appearance of the different characters, their costumes, the stage settings—all these have been discussed

"I am teaching *Julius Caesar* by the project method," airily announces the instructor in charge.

But is it a project? Dramatization it is, surely, and its result is increased interest and an awakened love for Shakespeare's plays. These children beg to be allowed to read another play before the end of the year. Surely, dramatization has its place in the schoolroom, but why not call it dramatization, which it is, instead of project which it is not?

A series of living pictures helps to sharpen the memories of these same Freshmen during their study of mythology. The teacher may call these pretty and useful devices a new set of projects. Are they more valuable because she does not call them tableaux?

When the word project, as applied to educational procedure, first came into vogue, its meaning was clear-cut and well defined. It implied the transfer of a situation of real life to the schoolroom with the intention of vitalizing and adding to the interest of the ordinary work, and with a forward look toward preparing pupils for situations which they might encounter later in real life.

Thus defined, the project marked a progressive step in education. It seemed to look ever toward new contacts between schoolroom life and real life.

The term has, however, come to be applied so loosely that its meaning is growing muddled. More and more frequently it is

applied indiscriminately to all schoolroom "stunts," to all devices out of the ordinary, to dramatization, to the play way, even to problems and exercises. It is suffering the usual fate of the educational slogan, and is becoming a mere catchword of unthinking pedagogues. We hear it used to justify any radical departure from traditional routine, whether such departure has a justifiable end in view or is a mere whim of the instructor.

Therein lies a danger. Every new educational slogan has at heart a real idea, born of the experience and the experiments of some progressive teacher, or of some group of progressive teachers. It gains a hearing, acquires a vogue, unfortunately, and soon becomes a byword, perhaps losing its power to help education in its slow evolution.

"Every lesson an English lesson" degenerated into an orgy of uncorrected, inexact, slovenly work. "The socialized recitation," a splendid method when controlled judiciously, threatens to meet the same fate since it is used so often to justify disorder and lack of control.

May I suggest that, weeding out some of the multiplicity of definitions of the word project just now in vogue, we might profit by a return to the truer idea of a project as a situation from real life transferred to the schoolroom to vitalize the routine and to help it make new contacts with the larger world of adult life?